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SUBJECT: COMMUNIST PARTY DEPUTY CHAIRMAN LOOKS TO HIS
PARTY'S FUTURE

REF: A. (A) MOSCOW 12498

¶B. (B) YEKATERINBURG 410

¶C. (C) MOSCOW 12708

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¶11. (SBU) Summary. In a December 6 meeting with EUR/RUS Director Mary Warlick, Communist Party (KPRF) Deputy Chairman Ivan Melnikov offered reactions to current domestic political events that confirmed his rumored social democratic leanings, and that suggested he was positioning himself to replace KPRF Chairman Gennadiy Zyuganov should the latter decide to retire, as rumored, in 2008. Melnikov confirmed that the KPRF would challenge in court recently-adopted electoral law amendments. He did not exclude KPRF cooperation with liberal democratic parties, such as the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and Yabloko. Melnikov strongly backed fewer restrictions on internal migration in order to lessen regional economic disparities. He thought that immigration, on the contrary, should be strictly controlled. "Other Russia" adherents Garry Kasparov and journalist Yevgeniya Albats report that Melnikov heads a KPRF faction interested in edging Chairman Gennadiy Zyuganov to the exit and pointing the party to a more social democratic future. End summary.

Election Law Challenges

¶12. (SBU) Warlick asked about the recent set of electoral law amendments that abolish the required minimum voter turnout, allow the removal of candidates from the ballot for "extremism," and forbid the use of "negative" campaigning (ref a). Melnikov said his party would challenge the amendments in the Constitutional Court by the end of January 2007, and maintained the Court would discredit itself if it did not find some of the amendments unconstitutional.

¶13. (SBU) The KPRF, said Melnikov, also plans to mount a court challenge to the practice of using a "locomotive," i.e., placing well-known candidates with name recognition at the head of party lists in regions where it is clear they will not serve if elected. (In the October 8 Lipetsk regional elections, Chairman of the Federation Council Sergey Mironov was on the Party of Life ballot, although it was obvious he had no plans to be a deputy there.)

Working with Other Parties

¶4. (SBU) Melnikov contended that the second, Kremlin-sponsored party, "A Just Russia" had been "appropriating" many of the KPRF's platform planks, although none of the Rodina Duma deputies (the only part of the new party currently represented on the federal level) had voted for them when earlier proposed by the KPRF. Melnikov regretted that the Duma had not passed legislation that would allow voters to recall Duma deputies who did not fulfill their campaign promises.

¶5. (SBU) The KPRF has begun to see the value of working with some of the liberal democratic parties, such as SPS and Yabloko, said Melnikov. While noting his disagreement with much that was in their platforms, Melnikov supported lowering the threshold for representation to allow those parties a voice. He said that the KPRF often finds itself voting with the western-oriented parties in the Duma. The SPS's strong showing in the December 3 Perm by-elections notwithstanding (ref b), Melnikov thought it would be at least fifteen or twenty years before liberal democratic parties would find favor with voters. In the interim, their main goal should be survival.

The Future

¶6. (SBU) Melnikov refused to comment on media reports that KPRF Chairman Gennadiy Zyuganov would for a third time declare himself a candidate for president. Zyuganov recognized that he could not go on forever, Melnikov said, and the KPRF was committed to nurturing younger party members. The KPRF would devote serious attention to the matter over the next year, Melnikov said.

¶7. (SBU) Melnikov joined Ilya Ponomarev of the KPRF's

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Information Technology Center (ref c) in asserting that the KPRF is becoming the party of choice among the younger intelligentsia. In cities, especially in ones where there are prominent universities, the KPRF was seeing support increase among younger voters, despite poorer results on election day. He claimed that some "thinking" people, disillusioned with the status quo, were voting for the KPRF.

¶8. (SBU) According to "Other Russia's (OR)" Garry Kasparov and Ekhino Moskvy journalist Yevgeniya Albats, Melnikov is affiliated with OR, as are other, like-minded members of the KPRF. Among Melnikov's party allies listed by Kasparov are Duma Deputy Vladimir Kulikov, Central Committee Presidium member Boris Kashin, and MGU Political Science Professor Aleksandr Solovev. All, according to Albats and Kasparov, are actively engaged in attempting to re-cast the KPRF, but they face resistance from the party's old guard and elsewhere on the spectrum from "young radicals" who would like to see more rapid change, both in the KPRF's platform and in its personalities.

¶9. (SBU) Kasparov alleged that ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov had been especially active in establishing contacts with disenchanted regional KPRF leaderships, who are looking for alternatives to the status quo. KPRF Chairman Zyuganov, he said, was well aware of restiveness in the party ranks and was "maneuvering" to keep it in check. Kasparov described the KPRF's plans to hold a rally in Moscow on December 10, Human Rights Day, as an effort by Zyuganov to preempt the more social-democratically minded in the KPRF rank-and-file who might be tempted to participate in a OR rally planned for December 16.

NGOs

¶10. (SBU) Although he had reservations about some NGO activity, Melnikov supported foreign pressure to ensure that foreign NGOs were not unfairly barred from working in Russia under the new NGO law. While NGOs would likely see little interference for now, Melnikov cautioned that problems would start once international attention had shifted elsewhere.

Immigration

¶11. (SBU) While Melnikov said he was disappointed by the recent deportations and other questionable treatment of Georgians, he noted that the KPRF opposed policies that would encourage immigration of those who did not possess needed skill sets. The KPRF, however, firmly supports relaxing restrictions on internal migration for Russian citizens as a way of lessening regional economic disparities. Melnikov cited Dagestan and Chechnya regions that would benefit from loosened restrictions on internal movement.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Melnikov is a moderate and thoughtful interlocutor, who shows an opposition party's appreciation for democratic political processes and who probably recognizes the threat that the left-leaning "A Just Russia" poses to the KPRF's weakened position among Russian voters. Melnikov seemed acutely aware that the KPRF will need to reinvigorate or reinvent itself to stay competitive. We have yet to see signs of the growing support among the disillusioned, educated young that Melnikov suggests are the KPRF's future.
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